

Joseph Alsop

Gen. Haig's Personal Sacrifice . . .

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Both humanly and politically, Gen. Alexander Haig's appointment is a remarkable development. But like many another remarkable development, it happened simply enough.

Last Saturday, General Haig had to report to President Nixon that he had failed to find anyone capable of carrying the enormous burden of responsibility that he has been carrying himself since the departure of H. R. Halde- man. The President then asked Haig to stay on. He did not press or plead. He merely made the request.

Quite properly, General Haig replied that he did not believe he could remain in his White House command post, without resigning from the U.S. Army. The President did not beg Haig to resign, or order him to resign, or offer him inducements to resign. But he registered no disagreement with General Haig's reply, and he did not withdraw his original request.

Whereupon General Haig agreed to stay on as a civilian, after a few further weeks in uniform that he needed to prepare for such a total change in way of life. It is a very, very long time since any American has made a comparable personal sacrifice for a public purpose. The U.S. Army had been Haig's chosen, genuinely loved career since he was a boy in his teens. He gave up what he loved when his highest ambition was literally within his grasp, to serve in what is now a post of danger.

It was also a post for which he had no wish whatever; but it was a post where he was badly needed. In sum, the highest traditions of the service that Haig was formed in, are now exemplified by his abandonment of that service. All in this wretched city, who still retain a grain of human charity, will agree about that.

Meanwhile, all with much political sense will again agree that the new arrangements at the White House give a badly needed new look to the total situation. No one is better qualified than Gen. Haig to serve as the President's chief of staff and general manager. His appointment means the end of the period of drift in the White House.

But on the political side, equal importance must certainly be given to the appointment of former Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird as the President's domestic councillor. Despite his weakness for circuitous approaches, Laird has always been a man of extreme ability. Even more significantly, he is also a man who knows the Congress and all other aspects of our politics from long, hard, practical, highly successful experience.

Arrogant blindness to political realities was one of the prime peculiarities of the former regime at the White House. That sticks out a mile from the Watergate horror. No politician in his senses would have run the smallest risk, for example, to bug Lawrence O'Brien's telephone. Crimes in politics are always possible, of course. But sane, experienced politicians do not commit absolutely purposeless and useless crimes.

Thus political idiocy has now been replaced by extreme political craftiness and shrewdness in the person of Melvin Laird. As Gen. Haig's appointment means an end to drift, Laird's appointment further means a beginning of more sane relations between the White House and Congress. Here, God knows, there is much to improve, just as there are a whole horde of problems needing urgent attention.

The moment is propitious, too, since the wiser leaders in Congress are growing more and more uneasy about



Gen. Haig, receiving a medal from the President.

By Charles Del Vecchio—The Washington Post

the total neglect of all other problems, because everyone is so busy wallowing in the Watergate horror. That was behind Sen. Herman Talmadge's successful pressure to shorten the Senate's Watergate hearings. At his suggestion, Sen. Sam J. Ervin has now agreed to complete the testimony of the President's principal advisers before the end of June.

Even more significantly, the bellweather of the House of Representatives has just called upon everyone to get back to the pressing business of normal government. Wilbur Mills of Arkansas is not merely the vastly powerful chairman of the Ways and Means committee. He is also a man who speaks very rarely. When he does so,

the aim is always to point a new direction. And the House has never failed to respond to a Mills plea of this kind.

Mills spoke, he confessed, because of "the impact upon our system of what is commonly referred to as Watergate." He remarked that "the President of the United States is in no way rendered powerless"; and he urged the President to begin acting again "with purpose and dispatch." He urged the Congress, even more fervently, to start tackling a long list of thorny problems on a broad front.

In short, the new team at the White House will find no lack of leaders in Congress who think other things are important besides Watergate.

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